



The Spectacle

From the Office Down the Hall

Walking the Field

One morning last month I had to come in early. It was cold inside the mansion. Despite the promise of an unseasonably warm day, I felt my fingers growing stiff as I stood and watched a documentary film crew struggle to place the few lights that we allowed them to use. It was very quiet. The crew, perhaps affected by my admonitions to mind the furnishings, spoke in whispers. The modern world of Washington DC was closed away outside and I felt encapsulated in wood.

The focus for all this activity was an interview with the celebrated former National Park Service historian Ed Bearss in the Morning Room at Arlington House. Wasting little time, the camera began to roll. Effortlessly pulling facts and little-known anecdotes from the closets of his mind, Ed closed his eyes and spoke for an hour into the still, dim and chilly room. I learned a lot. But I was most struck when he said that when he picks up a history book, he can tell instantly whether or not the author, “walked the field. The topography, the lay of the land, is everything.” He said, “you cannot understand a battle unless you have actually walked the battlefield.”

Ed was talking about Shiloh, but I found his observation held a larger metaphor. In many ways, we, the staff and volunteers at Arlington House, are the guides to the hills surrounding Lee’s life and his momentous resignation.

Ed intimated that desktop historians could not understand what it is like to slog over a certain hill, encumbered with gear—and perhaps terror—unless they had been in combat themselves or had at least walked that same



Arlington House

hill and felt their breath grow short at the top and their feet slide in the mud. Only then could the hesternal decisions, battles saved and opportunities lost, make any sense. Otherwise, it is just a view from cold space, a flattened satellite image taken from far away.

Many visitors to Arlington House have seen the fields of Lee’s life only as points on the map of the Civil War. They climb the rear stairs and emerge onto the second floor expecting furniture, not a battlefield. Yet a terrible struggle took place there and, by walking this battlefield, they may come to realize the topography of 1861 and discover why the country appears today as it does.

Walking this sheltered, neo-classical battlefield and finding the legacy of General George Washington and thirty years of family life at every turn is every bit as important as discovering an impassable erosion trench across the field at Shiloh. It is the topography of the mansion that tells us why Lee chose as he did. The film crew could have interviewed Ed at *his* home. It would have certainly been a lot warmer. But that would not have been enough. Ed wanted to do the interview here because it is the only place where we can all walk the field.

Kendell Thompson
Site Manager,
Arlington House,
The Robert E. Lee Memorial

Significant Historic Events in January

January 1862

After some of the Mount Vernon relics disappeared from Arlington, Selina Gray turned over the keys to General Irvin McDowell. McDowell was chagrined that thefts had occurred despite his presence, and he endeavored to have the remaining pieces of the “Washington Treasury” removed to a safer location, the Patent Office — now the National Portrait Gallery in Washington.

January 1, 1868

From Lexington, Lee wrote to Martha (“Markie”) Custis Williams: “With the return of a new year my mind reverts to you with fresh pleasure...you are often present to my thoughts & always come to brighten reminiscences of the past...My interest in time & its concerns is daily fading away & I try to keep my eyes & thoughts fixed on those eternal shores to which I am fast hastening.”

January 2, 1862

The Adjutant General directed that the former Arlington slaves be given subsistence because their care, once the responsibility of their owner, would now need to be assumed by the government.

January 3, 1803

After the death of his grandmother, Martha Washington, in 1802, GWP Custis purchased many of the Washington’s furnishings, livestock and farm equipment at a second Mount Vernon auction. After two such auctions, Custis owed \$4,545, a debt which took him years to pay.

January 4, 1858

On January 8 of this year, the New York Times published a letter written by Lee on January 4 from Arlington House:

“My attention has been called to an article from the Boston Traveler, dated Washington, 24th December, republished in the New York Times of the 30th, under the caption of ‘The Slaves of Mr. Custis.’

“It is there charged that the emancipation of the slaves will be much retarded, if not wholly prevented, by his heirs; that all attempts to see the will of Mr. Custis have proved abortive; that is whispered about Washington that foul play is in progress in regard to the Negroes on his plantations in Virginia; that they are now being sold South; that all of them will be consigned to hopeless Slavery unless something is done; and that nothing can be done unless the will is produced, &c.

“...[Mr. Custis’] will was submitted to the Alexandria County Court for probate on the first day of its session (7th December) after the arrival of the executor at Arlington, and is there on record in his own handwriting, open to inspection...

“What Mr. Custis is said to have stated to the Washington correspondent of the Boston Traveler, or to his assembled slaves, on his death bed, is not known to any member of his family. But it is well known that during the brief days of his last illness, he was constantly attended by his daughter, grand-daughter and niece, and faithfully visited by his physician and pastor. So rapid was the progress of his disease, after its symptoms became alarming, that there was no assembly of his servants, and he took leave of but one, who was present when he bade farewell to his family. R.E. Lee, Executor.”

(So far as is known, this is the only instance in which Lee publicly responded to an attack by an abolitionist.)

January 6, 1759

Martha Dandridge Custis, widow of Daniel Parke Custis, married George Washington on the Twelfth Day of Christmas. GWP Custis claimed that his grandmother’s wedding took place at St. Paul’s Church in New Kent

County, while his mother, Eleanor Calvert Custis, believed they were married at the White House, the Custis farm on the Pamunkey River.

January 8, 1863

Writing from camp at Fredericksburg, General Lee informed Mrs. Lee that he had fulfilled one of the stipulations of her father’s will: “I executed the deed of manumission sent to me by Mr. Caskie & returned it to him...”

January 9, 1826

Speaking at the annual meeting of the American Colonization Society in Washington, GWP Custis described slavery as “the mightiest serpent that ever infested the world.” He asserted that 200 years of slavery in the South had not accomplished as much as one generation of free men in the West.

January 9, 1857

From Texas, Lee wrote to his daughter, Mildred, about her music lessons: “I hope you will like Mr. Palmer better...but you will like neither the teacher nor subject unless you practice diligently & learn to play well. That is the secret. We are always fond of what we do well. Try it & you will find it so.”

January 14, 1846

Mrs. Lee and the children returned to Arlington to celebrate a belated Christmas with her parents. On the 14th, Lee wrote to his wife from Fort Hamilton, NY: “I am very solitary & my only companion is my dog & cats. But Speck has become so jealous now that he will hardly let me look at the cats. He seems to be afraid that I am going off from him & never lets me stir without him.”

January 19, 1807

Robert E. Lee, the fourth child of Henry Lee and his second wife, Ann Carter Lee, was born at Stratford Hall, Westmoreland County, Virginia. Robert Edward Lee was named for two of his mother’s brothers, Robert and Edward Carter.

(continued on page 3)

History Happenings

Doin' Time at Staunton Jail

A new school semester is upon us. Elementary school programs have recommenced at Arlington House. The start of a new academic year is a convenient time to reflect on the school experience of the Lee children. Each of the children received his or her early education at Arlington before leaving the plantation for boarding school.

A wealth of information exists concerning one of those academies. In 1855, Annie and Agnes enrolled as boarding students at the Virginia Female Institute in Staunton, Virginia. The school opened in 1844, although its origins can be traced back to a school conducted by Mrs. Maria Sheffy in her private home. VFI was affiliated with the Episcopal Church and the school was known for its religious environment. Reverend R.H. Phillips served as principal and Agnes described him as "handsome and attractive." Given the school's emphasis on religion, it is not surprising that both girls experienced a period of spiritual growth and

introspection during their time at the academy.

The institute developed an impressive reputation for its academic programs as well. Robert E. Lee served on the school's Board of Directors. He wrote a letter of endorsement for the VFI attesting to the fine education his daughters received. Annie's and Agnes' course of study included courses in algebra, chemistry, political economy, geography, logic, philosophy, composition, and French history and grammar. They also had courses in religious subjects such as Biblical literature, theology, and evidence of Christianity.

VFI students could elect to study the various "female arts." Both Lee girls studied drawing and painting in addition to piano. In July, 1856, Annie and Agnes performed at a musical exhibition at the school. Agnes had long dreaded the occasion, but on the night in question she actually enjoyed her rendition of "Witches' dance" by Paganini and reported "it was not nearly so fearful as I expected."

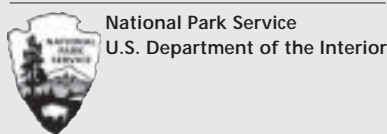
During their first months in Staunton, both girls experienced bouts of homesickness for Arlington and occasional shyness. Unenthusiastic about the many strict rules, Agnes dubbed the school the "Staunton Jail." As time passed, both girls progressed in their studies, made numerous friends, and eventually came

to enjoy their time at the VFI. Staunton proved somewhat dull after their exciting adventures in the nation's capital. Agnes declared, "Staunton is the same little monotonous place – I believe I will turn into a log."

Annie and Agnes completed their education at VFI in 1857 and returned to Arlington. The completion of their formal education signaled a transition to adulthood. When the girls returned to the plantation, they assumed a greater share of household responsibilities, including the education of the slaves. The transition to adulthood, coupled with the death of their grandfather and the escalating political tensions of the time, signaled the end of the relatively carefree years Annie and Agnes enjoyed at the Virginia Female Seminary.

The school still serves as an educational institution today. The VFI is now Stuart Hall, a co-ed Episcopal college preparatory school. The academy was renamed in honor of a later principal, Flora Stuart, the widow of J.E.B. Stuart of Civil War fame. Perhaps the school's most famous graduate is Juliette Gordon Low, the founder of the American Girl Scouts. To learn more about the VFI, see *Growing up in the 1850s* and *The Lee Girls*.

Karen Kinzey, Historian



Arlington House was the home of Robert E. Lee and his family for thirty years and is uniquely associated with the Washington and Custis families. It is now preserved as a memorial to General Lee, who gained the respect of Americans in both the North and the South.

Arlington House
The Robert E. Lee Memorial
c/o George Washington Memorial Parkway
Turkey Run Park
McLean, VA 22101

Phone
703-235-1530

Web Site
<http://www.nps.gov/arho>

The National Park Service cares for the special places saved by the American people so that all may experience our heritage.

Significant Historic Events in January (continued)

January 23, 1828

Mrs. Mary Randolph died in Washington, DC, at the age of 65. She was the wife of David Meade Randolph, a descendent of one of the oldest families in Virginia, a descendant of Pocahontas, and a cousin to Mary Fitzhugh Custis, Thomas Jefferson and Robert E. Lee. Tradition identifies her also as the godmother of Mrs. Robert E. Lee. Mrs. Randolph's 1824 first edition of "The Virginia Housewife" was considered the most influential American cookbook of the 19th Century. Her grave, located just below Arlington House on Custis Walk, is the oldest known grave in Arlington Cemetery.

January 29, 1756

Henry ("Lighthorse Harry") Lee, father of R.E. Lee, was born at "Leesylvania," near Dumfries in Prince William County, Virginia. He was the son of Henry Lee and Lucy Grymes and one of 8 children, the 2nd child & first son. A graduate of Princeton University, he attained the rank of Major General during the American Revolution and later served as Governor of Virginia and Congressman from Virginia.

Area Special Events

January 7

Living history, "Emancipation Day Observance," special program featuring portrayal of Robert Moton and Booker T. Washington at the Newsome House in Newport News, VA. Noon-2 pm. www.newsomehouse.org or 757-247-2360.

January 14

Living history, anniversary of the Second Battle of Fort Fisher, Kure Beach south of Wilmington, NC. Focus is on artillery aspects. Free. 910-458-5538 or www.ah.dcr.state.nc.us/sections/hs/fisher/fisher.htm.

Special programs commemorating the birth of Robert E. Lee at Stratford Hall (his birthplace), off Route 3 on the Potomac River in Virginia. 11 am-3 pm. Lee living history at 11:30 am and 1:30 pm. Free children's tours and other activities. Special exhibits and period music. Details: www.stratfordhall.org or 804-493-8038.

January 21

Lecture, James I. Robertson, "Lee and Jackson: A Partnership of Two Opposites," at Stratford Hall (Lee's birthplace), just off Route 3 near Montross, VA. Part of "The Path of Honor: From Stratford to Lexington — the Robert E. Lee Educational Series." 2 pm. Free. www.stratfordhall.org or 804-493-8038.

AN IMPORTANT REMINDER

Please contact Delphine Gross no later than the 20th of each month with availability dates and times to be posted the following month (Please call by January 20th with February information). Even if you are a regularly scheduled VIP please contact Delphine to confirm your availability. Again, the contact number is (703) 235-1530 ext. 227. Please leave the dates and times you are available on the voice mail. Your cooperation is greatly appreciated.

RECIPE OF THE MONTH

The Robert E. Lee Cake

The Robert E. Lee Cake, also known as the General Lee Cake, is a famous southern cake that was especially popular in the nineteenth century. There are numerous versions of this recipe in old cookbooks.

This cake can be made in honor of Robert E. Lee's birthday on January 19th. In 1890, the General Assembly of Virginia passed a law to make Lee's birthday a public holiday. Since that time the holiday has been changed to "Lee-Jackson-King Day." The cake would be a fitting desert for the holiday.

Ingredients:

2 cups sifted all-purpose flour
1/2 teaspoon cream of tartar
1 1/2 teaspoons baking powder
8 eggs
2 cups white sugar
1 1/2 tablespoons grated lemon zest
1/8 teaspoon salt
6 egg yolks
2 cups white sugar
3 tablespoons grated lemon zest
4 lemons, juiced
1/2 cup butter
1/4 cup butter
6 cups sifted confectioners' sugar
1 egg yolk
2 tablespoons lemon juice
4 tablespoons orange juice
1 1/2 tablespoons grated lemon zest
3 tablespoons grated orange zest

Directions:

1. Grease and flour four 9 inch cake pans. Preheat oven to 325°F (165°C). Sift together flour, cream of tartar, and baking powder four times. Set aside.
2. Beat 8 egg yolks with a rotary or electric beater until very thick, light and creamy. Add the 2 cups of sugar, a few tablespoons at a time, and continue beating until mixture is smooth and pale yellow. Stir in 1 lemon. Quickly fold in the flour mixture until well incorporated.
3. In a large glass or metal mixing bowl, whip the 8 egg whites until peaks form. Fold 1/3 of the whites into the batter, then quickly fold in remaining whites until no streaks remain.
4. Spoon into cake pans and bake for 20-25 minutes or until cake begins to pull away from sides of pans. Loosen edges with a knife and turn out on cake racks to cool while you prepare the filling and frosting.
5. To make *Lemon Jelly Filling*: Mix 6 egg yolks with 2 cups of sugar, grated rind of 2 lemons, and juice of 4 lemons. Cook over boiling water, stirring constantly, until sugar dissolves. Add 1/2 cup butter and continues cooking, stirring constantly, for 20 minutes or until filling is smooth and very thick. Cool, then spread between layers of cooled cake.
6. To make *Lemon-Orange Frosting*: Beat the 1/4 cup butter until it has the appearance of thick cream, stir in 6 cups confectioners sugar, a little at a time, and continue working until mixture is very smooth. Beat in 1 egg yolk and 2 tablespoons lemon juice. Stir in enough orange juice to make a spreadable frosting, then add grated rind of 1 lemon and 2 grated orange rinds. Spread on sides and top of cake.

Contributed by Meghan Kelleher

January 2006

Arlington House VIP Calendar

| Sunday | Monday | Tuesday | Wednesday | Thursday | Friday | Saturday |
|--|--|--|---|--|---|--|
| 1 Happy New Year | 2 Fred Hoffman 1:00-4:00 | 3 Aaron LaRocca 12:00-4:00 Fred Hoffman 1:00-4:00 | 4 Matt Abney 9:30-1:30 | 5 Walter DeGroot 9:30-11:30 C. Needham and Elaine Street 10:30-1:00 Gene Cross 11:00-4:30 Aaron LaRocca 12:00-4:00 | 6 Joan Cashell 9:30-11:30 | 7 Aaron LaRocca 10:00-3:00 Bryant Davis 10:30-12:30 Hope Flanagan 1:00-4:00 |
| 8 Jim Pearson 12:30-4:30 Andrew Strait 1:30-4:30 | 9 Fred Hoffman 1:00-4:00 | 10 Aaron LaRocca 12:00-4:00 Fred Hoffman 1:00-4:00 | 11 Elizabeth Pryor 9:00-12:30 Matt Abney 9:30-1:30 | 12 Walter DeGroot 9:30-11:30 C. Needham and Elaine Street 10:30-1:00 Gene Cross 11:00-4:30 Aaron LaRocca 12:00-4:00 | 13 Joan Cashell 9:30-11:30 | 14 Vanna Lewis 10:00-4:30 Aaron LaRocca 10:00-3:00 Hope Flanagan 1:00-4:00 |
| 15 Elene Paul 11:00-3:00 Jim Pearson 12:30-4:30 Andrew Strait 1:30-4:30 | 16 Fred Hoffman 1:00-4:00 | 17 Aaron LaRocca 12:00-4:00 Fred Hoffman 1:00-4:00 | 18 Matt Abney 9:30-1:30 | 19 C. Needham and Elaine Street 10:30-1:00 Gene Cross 11:00-4:30 Aaron LaRocca 12:00-4:00 | 20 Joan Cashell 9:30-11:30 | 21 Aaron LaRocca 10:00-3:00 Hope Flanagan 1:00-4:00 |
| 22 Elene Paul 11:00-3:00 Jim Pearson 12:30-4:30 Andrew Strait 1:30-4:30 | 23 Fred Hoffman 1:00-4:00 | 24 Aaron LaRocca 12:00-4:00 Fred Hoffman 1:00-4:00 | 25 Elizabeth Pryor 9:00-12:30 Matt Abney 9:30-1:30 | 26 Walter DeGroot 9:30-11:30 C. Needham and Elaine Street 10:30-1:00 Gene Cross 11:00-4:30 Aaron LaRocca 12:00-4:00 Kathie Lipovac 12:30-4:30 | 27 Joan Cashell 9:30-11:30 | 28 Aaron LaRocca 10:00-3:00 Hope Flanagan 1:00-4:00 |
| 29 Jim Pearson 12:30-4:30 Andrew Strait 1:30-4:30 | 30 Fred Hoffman 1:00-4:00 | 31 Kathie Lipovac 12:30-4:30 Fred Hoffman 1:00-4:00 | <div> <p>If you are available to volunteer, but are not on the calendar please call Delphine so you can be added to the schedule.</p> </div> | | | |



National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

Arlington House
The Robert E. Lee Memorial
c/o George Washington Memorial Parkway
Turkey Run Park
McLean, VA 22101

<<Name>>
<<Address>>
<<CityStateZip>>

EXPERIENCE YOUR AMERICA™

The Spectacle is a monthly newsletter for the volunteers of Arlington House, The Robert E. Lee Memorial.

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Comments? Write to:

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Turkey Run Park
McLean, VA 22101

Volunteers Needed

The roster of active volunteers is in dire need of additional names! If you know anyone interested in joining our ranks please refer them to Delphine Gross, Volunteer Coordinator (703) 235-1530 ext. 227.

